DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 091 CG 013 533

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TITLE Women On Ships: Attitudes and Issues.
INSTITUTION Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY Navy Personnel Research and Development Center, San Diego, Calif.
PUB DATE 29 Aug 78
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August, 1978); Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Armed Forces; Enlisted Personnel; *Equal Opportunities (Jobs); *Females; Military Training; *Officer Personnel; Research Projects; *Sex Fairness; Sex Role; *Work Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A survey of 480 Navy women revealed that nearly 90% of the total sample believed that women should be allowed to serve on ships exactly as men do. Also, over 50% of the sample declared themselves ready to go to sea when called, despite the fact that this was not expected of them when they entered the Navy. It can be concluded that Navy enlisted women, and particularly women officers, realize that sea duty is essential if they are to be fully equal and responsible members of the Navy organization. One crucial issue emerging from the survey data is the probable sizeable resistance of the male officer community to the advent of women on ships. Although 80% of incoming Navy enlisted men expressed willingness to work with women on ships, officers' ambivalence could create serious obstructions to the integration of women into crews. Navy management should be aware of this and other potential problems in order to minimize their impact during the initial transition to integrated ships. (Author/BP)

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WOMEN ON SHIPS: ATTITUDES AND ISSUES

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GG0135333

Paper presented at Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association,

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

(August 29, 1978)

CN001324

WOMEN ON SHIPS: ATTITUDES AND ISSUES

Further expansion of the numbers and roles of women in the Navy is dependent on lifting the statutory ban on sea duty. The Navy has proposed that the law be reinterpreted to permit the assignment of women to certain auxiliary and support ships. In July, U.S. District Court Judge John Sirica ruled unconstitutional the provision of the federal code which states that "women may not be assigned to duty in aircraft that are engaged in combat missions nor may they be assigned to duty on vessels of the Navy other than hospital ships and transports" (10 U.S.C. Section 6015), because "sex is required to take precedence over individual ability" (San Diego Evening Tribune, August 9, 1978). This paper addresses the attitudinal data available to anticipate sources of resistance to the imminent transition to sexually integrated crews, and assesses the willingness of Navy women to serve at sea.

Informal surveys by journalists have highlighted resistance of Navy men to integration and lack of interest of Navy women in shipboard assignments (e.g., headline of a May 8, 1978, UPI story [Los Angeles Times]: "East Coast Survey-- Women Decry Sea Duty;" or, headline of August 8, 1978 story [San Diego Evening Tribune], based on a "Tribune survey": "Few Navy Women Bubbly Over Duty-at-Sea Prospects"). Objections of small groups of Navy wives have also received widespread publicity.

CAPT Robin Quigley (Ret.), the first female naval officer to command a major shore installation, wrote an essay recently in Sea Power Magazine which was reprinted in Navy Times and elsewhere, generating extensive publicity and comment. She asserted: "Those women [on active duty] would not have entered the Navy with the understanding that they would be required to serve at sea, and my experience as Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Women (1971-1973) tells me that there would be only miniscule numbers who would be prepared to accept continued service under such conditions." She also stated, "...it seems to me most unlikely that the comfort-, convenience-, and glamour-oriented young American woman would view such a [shipboard]

life as her golden opportunity and the basis for which to volunteer!"

A recent nationwide survey of 14,000+ households disproves this latter assertion, since with expanded nontraditional job opportunities 24% of American women 18 to 25 years old would consider joining the service, and this figure only drops to 20% if the prospective jobs were to include sea duty and assignment to combat (Navy Times, July 17, 1978). (Under current conditions, 16% of men 18 to 25 would be likely to enlist; see Borack, 1978, for more information.) But what about active duty women, who entered the Navy believing they could not be assigned sea duty? Is it true that only a handful are willing to go to sea? A recent survey administered by Navy Personnel Research and Development Center addressed this issue.

PROCEDURE

In 1976 and 1977, 378 enlisted women (EW) were surveyed with the Women in the Navy Questionnaire (WINQ). They were stationed at some 25 commands including air stations, naval stations (harbor craft), air squadrons and medical clinics. The EW were surveyed at group meetings by a women's ombudsman, and the resulting sample may not be statistically representative of all Navy EW since only Pacific commands were visited and the majority of these were from the aviation community. The pay grade distribution was similar to that of EW Navywide however, with 51% of the survey sample at level E-2 and E-3 and 46% E-4 or E-5. Mean age for the EW was 22½ years, and all were at least high school graduates.

Responses of EW were compared to those of 102 officers who also took the WINQ, the same officer sample that was discussed by Ms. Thomas in "The Female Naval Officer: What is her Role?" (1978).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that the vast majority of both officer and enlisted women endorsed the concept of sea duty for women, though officers were significantly more positive on item 1, and item 2 regarding assignment to combatants.[1] The last 2 columns of the table reveal that women in the nontraditional mechanical and electronic ratings, which involve work done principally shipboard, were significantly more in favor of sea duty than traditionally-rated women. Item 3 shows that somewhat more of the nontraditionally-rated women felt hindered in advancement relative to women in traditional jobs, but over twice as many officers as enlisted women (63 vs 29%) felt lack of sea experience made advancement more difficult. Only 15% of officer women vs 30% of enlisted women would leave the Navy if women were assigned to ships. These figures are surprisingly low considering the women entered the Navy under conditions which barred women from sea duty. Among enlisted women, it is clear that those in traditional jobs were less willing to consider sea duty (one in three would seek discharge vs. one in five of the nontraditionally-rated women). The last item of Table 1 reveals that officers were less inclined than enlisted women to believe that relationships between men and women would cause a deterioration in the efficient running of ships.

The open-ended question analyzed in Table 2 asked respondents whether they personally would want to serve aboard a ship. Though Table 1 revealed that around nine out of ten Navy women believed that capable women should be allowed sea duty, Table 2 shows that only 56% of officers and 51% of enlisted women personally desired sea duty. (Though nearly half did not desire sea duty, note again that Table 1 showed less than a third of enlisted women and only 15%

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[1] Sinclair(1977) surveyed all Coast Guard women regarding sea duty, and analyzed 191 questionnaires (a 36% sample). Fifty-nine percent believed women should be ordered to sea duty the same as men; 10% did not want sea duty but would take it; and an additional 11% felt only certain women should be ordered to sea (e.g., single, non-mothers, or volunteers).

of officers would actually seek discharge if the ban on sea duty were lifted.) The desire to go to sea of over half of Navy women is impressive, and a far cry from being "miniscule numbers".

Table 2 summarizes the content analysis of the primary reason stated for wanting or not wanting to go aboard ships. Adventure and travel were the most frequent inducements to sea for enlisted women, while officers were more concerned with career advancement. One enlisted woman stated, "It would be a very exciting experience and also it would prove that I could handle it." With respect to advancement, officers mentioned the need for sea experience to prepare for command. A typical enlisted statement was: "In my rate advancement is easier on a ship and the type of work is much more challenging. We wouldn't get 'accused' of 'taking shore billets and not pulling our fair share'."

Both groups of women made equal mention of duty as the main reason to serve aboard ships, and it was similarly argued that sexual equality should be promoted by allowing women sea duty. Comments did not indicate lack of awareness of the arduous nature of sea duty. An enlisted woman stated simply, "I feel it's my duty as a sailor," while another said: "It seems ridiculous for women to be excluded from the major function of the organization to which they belong on the basis of sex. I realize there are practical problems involved, but they can be solved given the proper set of circumstances." An officer stated: "I would like the opportunity to serve aboard ship because that is the heart of naval service. I am not at all sure I would particularly enjoy the rigors of sea duty, but that is not the point ... it is my feeling that any woman who wishes to only volunteer for the part of the service that suits her should not bother to apply. Equal opportunity means exactly that."

Among those not desiring to serve aboard ship, enlisted women were more likely to state blankly that "ships are for men only." One added, "I joined the Navy as a woman not as a man; I do not feel that I would be safe on a boat with as many men as there would probably be." Another said, "I wouldn't be looked at as feminine anymore."

Fourteen percent of officers would avoid ships because of unsatisfactory living conditions. Twenty-one percent of EW gave this reason, and enlisted quarters are less habitable than those of officers. One enlisted woman feared the lack of privacy would ruin relationships with fellow workers and potential friends. An officer said: "The Navy is only a job for me. Living on a ship, it would be my life. I would find shipboard life distasteful. I need the freedom to leave when my job is done for the day."

More enlisted than officer women were concerned about erosion of good order and discipline (to the extent that one respondent foresaw a "Peyton Place"), while officers were more likely than enlisted women to feel they could not do a capable shipboard job. It can be seen that the professionalism of women officers is related to both the major reason for desiring sea duty, i.e advancement, and the major reason for the avoidance of sea duty by other officers, i.e. feeling they are not trained to assume leadership roles on ships. Family separations and unfavorable male attitudes were not frequently mentioned by either officers or EW.

Table 3 shows that for the few mothers in the sample, interest in sea duty ran at 40 rather than 50%, not a significant difference. Marital status made no difference in desire for sea duty among enlisted women, but single officer women were more willing to go shipboard than their married counterparts.

Career intentions were related to desire for sea duty, which ranged from 40% for short-termers to 61% for career-oriented women. Finally, there was a tendency for interest in sea duty to increase with increasing pay grade and rank. The exception was the group of two Commanders, both of whom rejected the possibility of sea duty because their careers had not prepared them for XO/CO responsibilities on ships. (As it turns out, women volunteers for sea duty are only being sought at level O-4 and below.)

What about male attitudes toward women on ships? There is not extensive data on the question, but several other surveys conducted by Navy Personnel R & D Center (NPRDC) have at least touched on the topic. Approximately half of nearly 1,000 junior enlisted men and women questioned in 1977 after two years' service in the Navy approved of women in all jobs including those on combatant ships, while an additional 25 to 30 percent of both groups approved of shipboard jobs for women on non-combatants only (Olson, personal communication). This paygrade-matched sample showed no difference in proportions of women and men endorsing sea duty for women. These survey results also showed a much higher level of endorsement of unrestricted shipboard roles for women among enlisted personnel than was true 4-1/2 years earlier (Fuller, 1973), with the most dramatic rise (from 21% to 48%) among junior enlisted women.

Recruit data is available that shows substantial willingness among men to work with women aboard ships. Each year NPRDC surveys 500 to 1,000 recruits to monitor opinions in this incoming population. Percentages of male recruits who would want to work with women aboard ship showed a small increase from 76% in 1975 to 80% in 1976 and 1977 (sample N's of 848, 560, and 975, respectively; E. Thomas, personal communication).

Information on attitudes of male officers is less available. Of 1,000 Naval Academy midshipmen, only 35% of the men surveyed in 1977 supported changing policies to permit women to serve on Navy ships (Durning, 1978). Though current attitudes may be more liberal, on the 1972 survey of Coye, et al, (Coye, Denby, Hooper & Mullen, 1973), only 19% of male naval officers agreed with the statement: "Women officers should be given the same oppportunities as their male counterparts, including sea duty and flying status." Fuller's (1973) data further show that male officers are more resistant to the idea of integration than enlisted men: 19% of officers vs. 29% of EM endorsed unrestricted shipboard service for women, with an additional 60% and 54% respectively accepting the idea of women on ships if some restrictions are maintained. Enlisted men may see the advent of women on ships advantageously as easing their own sea-shore rotation schedules and normalizing the social environment at sea, while officers may be more sensitive to potential leadership problems, and perhaps to a perceived loss of professional prestige if women command ships, etc. (Career chief petty officers may also be protective of their professional image as seagoing men, and like the officers resent the intrusion of women into their male fraternity, but I have no data which allows separation of their attitudes from the generally pro-integration views of EM overall.)

A final NPRDC survey of relevance showed that of 463 wives in the aviation community, only 12% were strongly opposed to integrated ships to the extent that they would urge their husbands to get out, a figure much lower than has been assumed (cf. Thomas and Durning, 1976, for an analysis of a portion of this sample).

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that Navy EW and particularly women officers realize that sea duty is essential if they are to be fully equal and responsible members of the Navy organization. Nearly 90% of the total sample of 480 Navy women believed women should be allowed to go to sea, and over half of the sample surveyed are ready to go when called, despite the fact that this eventuality was not expected when these women entered the Navy.

Women have already proven their seagoing capabilities on tugboats (Kane, 1978), in 1972 on U.S.S. SANCTUARY[2], and currently on the two large Coast Guard cutters. Yet to prepare for integration the Navy must attend to training issues for women, selection for physical capabilities, equipment redesign, and considerations of group dynamics (e.g., ratios of women to men), to name a few areas.

Perhaps the most crucial issue emerging from the survey data summarized is the probably sizable resistance of the male officer community to the advent of women on ships. Despite the willingness of 80% of incoming Navy EM to work with women on ships, ambivalent leadership on the line could have insidious effects on the successful integration of women into crews.

In anticipation of the intergroup phenomena which may occur with shipboard integration, Naval Academy data typical of initial responses of males to intrusion of women into previously closed all-male groups are informative. Themes which emerged from a 1977 open-ended query on sexual integration were (1) the undue publicity accorded to the first women midshipmen; (2) perceptions of favoritism to women; (3) claims of lowered standards and lowered group performance; (4) emphasis on the physical incapabilities of women; and (5) perceptions of the first

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[2] "Women can perform every shipboard function with equal ease, expertise, and dedication as men do." (Memo. from the C.O., U.S.S. SANCTUARY [AH-17] to CNP, Nov. 19, 1973, p. 15-1.)

women as non-representative "freaks". In turn, the first female plebes complained of male resentment and overvisibility (which generates performance pressures) (Durning, 1978). Navy management should be aware of these potential problems in order to minimize their impact during the initial transition to integrated ships.

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Table 1

Attitudes of Navy Women Toward Sea Duty

Item	Percentage Answering "Agree"				
	Officers (N=102)	Enlisted (N=378)	Enlisted by Rating (Traditional = 205)		(Nontraditional = 77)
1. Women should be allowed to go to sea if they want to and can do the job.	97	$p < .01$[a] 85	80	$p < .01$[b]	92
2. If women go to sea, they should not be barred from serving on ships going into combat.	88	$p < .01$[a] 68	62	$p < .01$[b]	82
3. Not going to sea makes it harder for me to advance in my rating or specialty than it is for men.	63	$p < .01$[a] 29	29		35
4. If the law were changed so that women were assigned to ships, I would get out of the Navy.	15	$p < .01$[a] 30	33	$p < .05$[b]	20
5. If women were assigned to ships, relationships between men and women would affect the efficient running of the ship.	21	$p < .01$[a] 39	41	$p < .05$[b]	29

[a]Significant difference between proportions of officers and enlisted women agreeing with statement, two-tailed test.

[b]Significant difference between proportions of women agreeing with statement in traditional and nontraditional ratings, one-tailed test.

Table 2

"Why Would You Want or Not Want to Serve Aboard a Ship?"

	Percentage of Respondents	
	Officers (N = 102)	Enlisted (N = 378)
I would want to serve aboard a ship because:	55.6	51.4
My duty	15	15
Adventure/travel	26	42
Advancement	31	6
Sexual equality	17	13
Miscellaneous	11	24
I would not want to serve aboard a ship because:	44.3	48.5
"Ships are for men only"	0	18
Unsatisfactory living conditions	14	21
Would erode order/discipline	5	13
I do not feel capable	19	12
Family separation	11	5
Ratio of women to men unfavorable; negative male attitudes	2	5
Miscellaneous	49	25

Table 3

Factors Related to Desire for Sea Duty

Subgroup	Percentage of Subgroup Desiring Sea Duty
• Mothers (N=40)	40
Nonmothers (N=414)	51
• Not planning to reenlist or extend (N=143)	40
Career-oriented (N=92)	61**
Undecided (N=177)	54
• Enlisted Pay Grade Groups:	
E2 (N=40)	45
E3 (N=121)	48
E4-5 (N=147)	51
E6-7 (N=9)	56
Officer Rank:	
O1 (N=25)	56
O2 (N=26)	58
O3 (N=31)	58
O4 (N=9)	67
O5 (N=2)	0
• Married Officers (N=43)	44
Single Officers (N=52)	63*
Married Enlisted (N=203)	49
Single Enlisted (N=118)	51

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

Starred proportion is significantly greater than the proportion preceeding it (one-tailed test).